United Nations E/CN.17/2000/8

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 February 2000
Original: English

Commission on Sustainable Development
Eighth session
24 April-5 May 2000
Item 8 of the provisional agenda*
Other matters

Implementation of the work programme on education, public awareness and training

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.17/2000/1.

00-28268 (E) 130300

Introduction

1. Education, public awareness and training, as taken up in chapter 36 of Agenda 21,[1] constitute a cross-cutting area that has been recognized as indispensable in respect of achieving sustainable development and successfully implementing all chapters of Agenda 21. In recognition of the preponderant role of education, public awareness and training in bringing about the necessary changes in behaviour and lifestyles, including changes in consumption and production patterns, the Commission on Sustainable Development initiated at its fourth session in 1996 (see decision 4/11)[2] an international work programme which was more fully developed at its sixth session to include 7 programmes and 23 tasks (decision 6/3).[3] The annex to the present report provides a breakdown of the work programme. The Secretary-General was asked to report on the implementation of the work programme at the eighth session of the Commission (decision 7/4).[4] This report was prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as task manager.

2. In general, in both international and national circles, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of education as a key instrument for solving the problems and challenges facing humankind, including poverty, population, environmental degradation, social and economic development, consumption and production. In both developed and developing countries, there is now a widespread call for the rethinking of education systems in light of the needs not only of the present but also of the future. Education is therefore gradually being understood as an integral and indispensable part of the solution to the world's problems and to the building of a sustainable future. This is not to say that education can single-handedly "change the world", but rather that education is a critical part of the solution. At the same time, there is increasing recognition that all sectors of society need to engage in the educational enterprise, and that education is the responsibility of all sectors of society, all of which are potential beneficiaries of the improvements that education can help bring about.

3. The Commission on Sustainable Development work programme was formulated against this background. Its implementation needs to be seen, therefore, as part of an integrated process of change that aims above all to eradicate poverty and to change wasteful patterns of consumption and production. All actors, as specified explicitly within the work programme and indicated in the annex, bear part of the responsibility. Of greatest priority and importance, however, is action at the national level. It is, above all, Governments, non-governmental organizations and national media, as well as local authorities and associations, that must muster the power, the will and the wherewithal to make the changes called for in the work programme of the Commission.

4. Moreover, evaluating implementation of the work programme needs to take into account the scope and timescale of the kinds of changes that are being sought. Reorienting education in the new perspective of sustainability has to be achieved by building on the myriad existing structures, curricula and all other forms of lifelong education concerning people everywhere of all ages.

I. Mobilizing action at national level

A. Mobilizing Governments

5. With regard to formal education and, to a large extent, non-formal education as well, Governments are the key actors in most countries. The United Nations system, and particularly UNESCO as task manager, has attempted to maximize its links with Governments to draw awareness to the priorities established by the Commission on Sustainable Development and to promote action at the national level.

6. In this vein, in August 1999 the Director-General of UNESCO sent a letter to ministers responsible for UNESCO matters in all countries. The letter was copied to all UNESCO permanent delegations, country missions to the United Nations, United Nations resident coordinators and other interested parties. The purpose of the letter was to:

- Encourage Governments to work towards the objectives outlined in the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme;
- Assure Governments that UNESCO together with all of its partners within the United Nations system and the international community stood ready to cooperate with countries in this regard;

- Ask Governments to provide to UNESCO, as task manager, information on the status within their country of the priority areas for action defined in the work programme.

7. Furthermore, the letter pointed out that the Commission on Sustainable Development had identified Governments as the key actors for the following priority areas of the Commission's work programme:

- Reviewing national policies from the perspective of sustainable development;
- Reorienting formal education systems;
- Integrating education within national strategies and plans for sustainable development;
- Raising public awareness.

8. The letter from the Director-General of UNESCO emphasized that the challenge of sustainable development required new partnerships of public and private actors. He pointed out that, within Governments, education for sustainability was of direct concern not only to ministries of education, but also to ministries of environment, planning, agriculture, health and commerce, and others. He highlighted the need to reach beyond those traditionally concerned with education so as to create a "cross-cutting dynamic". Annexed to the letter were key documents and publications of the Commission on Sustainable Development (E/CN.17/1998/6/Add.2 and the reports of the Commission on its sixth[5] and seventh[6] sessions, as well as the summary table prepared by UNESCO).

9. As of late December 1999, replies had been received from 17 Governments.[7] A preliminary review indicates that there is still a need for further clarifying the fundamental difference between "education for sustainable development" and "environmental education". Education for sustainable development includes, but is not limited to, environmental education. There is evidence, however, that progress is being made in some countries. For example, the German Government decided in mid-1999 to create a new programme for secondary schools called "Education for Sustainable Development" for which the equivalent of US$ 13 million has been allocated. In Bulgaria, the legal framework for education has been reformulated through a series of laws that recognize education for all as an important force in society. In Mexico, a national Programme for Educational Development is being implemented (1995-2000) as well as a reform of basic education and the reorientation of programmes of study. In Thailand, a National Education Act of Basic Education was promulgated in 1999 in order to bring about major changes in educational systems and their management. In Pakistan, the main objectives of the National Education Policy (1998-2010) are oriented towards sustainable development. Burkina Faso recently adopted a Ten-Year Plan for the Development of Basic Education (2000-2009).

B. Mobilizing teachers

10. Teachers at all levels are key agents of change. Priority has thus been given to developing tools for the reorientation of teacher education towards sustainable development. The fact that there are approximately 59 million teachers in the world requires innovative approaches. Combining the power of the Internet with multimedia professional teaching strategies, UNESCO is developing a multimedia professional development programme entitled "Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future" with the following objectives:

- To develop an appreciation of the scope and purpose of education for sustainability;
- To clarify concepts and themes and how they can be integrated in all subject areas across the school curriculum;
- To enhance skills for integrating issues of sustainability into a range of school subjects and classroom topics;
- To enhance skills for using a wide range of interactive and learner-centred teaching and learning strategies that underpin the knowledge, critical thinking, values and citizenship objectives implicit in reorienting education towards sustainable development.

11. The programme consists of 25 self-study modules that address the difficult challenge of planning for whole-school change, teaching interdisciplinary themes, using learner-centred approaches to classroom teaching, and developing outcomes-based assessment strategies. The programme will be available as from mid-2000 in two formats: on the Internet (www.unesco.org/general/eng/programmes/target/epd/tlsf/index.html) and as an Internet compact disk (CD)

that contains all required software and will function in exactly the same way as the web site. The CD will also be programmed to allow for downloading all periodic updates to the Internet programme.

12. A pilot version of the programme will be tested through UNESCO field offices in all the regions, including translation into other languages. The goal is for educational authorities to be encouraged to adapt the "core" programme developed by UNESCO to national and/or local specificities. Based on feedback from these pilot tests, the programme will be finalized and posted on the web site. All of this will be available free of charge to users worldwide.

13. Another initiative of note is the creation by York University (Canada) of a UNESCO Chair for Reorienting Teacher Education Towards Sustainable Development. The goal of the chair is to develop an international network of teacher training institutions that will undertake research and experimentation according to common objectives and a common methodology, the outcome being a set of international guidelines based on experience in different parts of the world.

C. Mobilizing non-governmental organizations

14. Non-governmental organizations represent a formidable resource for communicating the key messages of education for sustainable development. Since the inception of the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme, there have been many important activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations on their own, collectively, or in cooperation with United Nations bodies. Given the diversity and decentralization of efforts, one challenge is to keep track of what is being done, so that the various groups can work together, learn from each other and avoid duplication. The International Registry of Innovative Practices Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training for Sustainability described in this report has been designed with this important objective in mind.

15. Non-governmental organizations focused on youth have been particularly active. An example of youth involvement is the work of Peace Child International, which, during 1999, prepared jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and in partnership with UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the children's edition of the UNEP Global Environment Outlook report entitled "Pachamama". Peace Child International also organized the Millennium Young People's Congress (Hawaii, October 1999). Another youth undertaking consisted of two versions of the "Young Reporters for the Environment Guidebook", one for youth and one for teachers, prepared in 1999 by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe, located in the Netherlands.

16. Initiatives have been taken in 1999 by UNESCO in its task management function to begin a process of reaching out more systematically to non-governmental organizations in the framework of the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme and to mobilize more effectively these key actors. To this end, a consultation was held in Paris in September 1999 with the Chair and other representatives of the NGO Education Caucus, which has presented statements at sessions of the Commission, as well as with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. At the same time, discussions have begun with the UNESCO conference of Non-Governmental Organizations which includes 337 international organizations with which UNESCO maintains official relations. These non-governmental organizations represent the principal international non-governmental organizations bodies concerned with education and related topics relevant to UNESCO's mandate. In this context, UNESCO invited the Non-Governmental Organizations Steering Committee to make proposals on how best to mobilize non-governmental organization networks concerned with education. A meeting in this regard was proposed for February 2000.

17. It is anticipated that emphasis will be given in the coming period to building a process that taps these existing collaborative mechanisms and creates synergy among them as well as to exploring how links might be made with other such groupings.

II. Identifying and sharing best practices

18. In 2000, UNESCO will finalize the International Registry of Innovative Practices Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training for Sustainability. This

system is being developed in response to calls by Governments, non-governmental organizations and others to find innovative ways to identify and share best practices in this field. The Registry is designed to be a cost-effective and convenient means of allowing anyone in the world to: contribute and gather credible and up-to-date information about people, organizations, projects, programmes, products, services, technologies, research, documents and so forth and to organize this information according to a particular need or interest (for example, the need to obtain a listing of teacher training institutions in a given country or region that integrate education for sustainability into their curricula). UNESCO will launch the registry system with a tool kit with which individual countries, institutions or regional groups will be able to develop, at low cost, their own registry mechanism or node. Each node will be linked to other such nodes within a country or around the world. The Governments of the United States of America and Canada have provided financial support for this effort.

19. An "ESDebate" was conducted over the Internet from September to December 1999 as a contribution of the Government of the Netherlands to the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme and as a follow-up to the conference held in Soesterberg. The aim of the debate was to explore the implications of the broadened scope of environmental education from a theoretical as well as a practical point of view, and to offer concrete suggestions on the new role and practical uses of education for sustainable development. The "International Debate on Education for Sustainable Development" was initiated by the Dutch Inter-Departmental Steering Group on Environmental Education which spans six ministries. The results of the debate will be published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources — World Conservation Union (IUCN).

20. The European Commission organized a European Conference on Environmental Education and Training in Brussels in May 1999. It was attended by more than 130 experts from all over Europe (European Union (EU) member States and Eastern European countries), representing national administrations, international organizations and institutions, non-governmental organizations and environmental associations, academia, school establishments, enterprise and trade unions. The objectives were to:

- Draw the attention of European decision makers to the importance of environmental education and training at both national and Community level;
- Discuss the added value of European Commission activities in this field, with a particular focus on the directions to be followed in the near future;
- Offer an opportunity for the exchange of information and good practices among all actors concerned;
- Stimulate networking and informal contacts among all the participants.

21. The Organization of American States (OAS)/UNESCO Joint Programme on Education for Sustainable Development was launched in 1998 to promote sustainability as a central concern of development initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on education and governance. Among other activities carried out in 1999, a meeting on Democratic Initiatives in Education in the Americas was held in Ecuador in September 1999 to consider globalization and decentralization as they relate to public education in the region. A Network to Support Public Education in the Americas was formed at the meeting. In September 1999 in Mexico, the Sixth Congress on Environment in the Americas was held. The OAS/UNESCO programme is part of the Inter-American Strategy for Public Participation in Sustainable Development approved by OAS member Governments in December 1999. This Strategy stems from the 1996 Summit of the Americas held in Bolivia in 1996.

III. Education for all: a top priority

22. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 states as its first objective (para. 36.4 (a)): "to endorse the recommendations arising from the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs (Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990) and to strive to ensure universal access to basic education, and to achieve primary education for at least 80 per cent of girls and 80 percent of boys of primary school age ... and to reduce the adult illiteracy rate to at least half of its 1990 level". Basic education, encompassed since Jomtien within the broader concept of Education for All, is thus a cornerstone of chapter 36 and for most of the world remains the overriding educational challenge.

23. After Jomtien, an International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum) was set up to serve as a coalition of agencies and specialists to further the recommendations of the Jomtien conference. The EFA Forum is sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and the World Bank, as well as several bilateral donor agencies, with the secretariat provided by UNESCO. The EFA Forum is now carrying out the EFA 2000 Assessment, a worldwide stock-taking and planning exercise pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/84 of 12 December 1997. The objectives are: to construct a comprehensive picture of progress and shortfalls in achieving the Jomtien goals; to identify priorities and new strategies for overcoming obstacles and accelerating progress; and to revise earlier plans for EFA at the start of the twenty-first century, notably, through stronger partnership between Governments and civil society.

24. The assessment is being carried out by each country according to technical guidelines and 18 core EFA indicators. National EFA reports have been prepared by 160 countries, with reports expected from a total of 181 countries (available at www.education.unesco.org/efa). These reports as well as a draft framework for action are being taken up by six regional EFA conferences held from December 1999 to February 2000. A World Education Forum will be held in Dakar in April 2000 to draw up the final framework for action. As a result of this process, the many diverse actors in the education arena at international and national levels will have a more solid basis for taking measures to accelerate efforts to meet the ambitious but essential goals of EFA, thus contributing to achieving the overriding objective of education for sustainable development.

IV. The 10-year review of Agenda 21

25. In preparing for the review of chapter 36 and the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme in 2002, the following topics may be of particular concern to the Commission in terms of both concrete achievement and strategic direction for the future:

1. Review of the education aspects of integrated follow-up to the United Nations conferences and post-Rio conventions at both international and national levels, including consideration of conceptual and institutional constraints that impede such integration.

2. Review of the extent to which education has been taken into account within national strategies and action plans for sustainable development.

3. Analysis of the financing of education by international and regional financial institutions with respect to the various components of education for sustainable development and the priorities outlined in the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme.

4. Review of the results of the EFA 2000 Assessment and its relevance for future work within the context of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

5. Review of achievements in the reorientation of higher education towards sustainable development, in light of the action plan of the World Conference on Higher Education held in 1999.

6. Review of achievements in reorienting teacher education towards sustainable development, with a view to guiding future work for this critical target audience.

7. Review of partnership arrangements to further education for sustainable development, particularly among major groups, including mobilization and synergies among non-governmental organizations.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28), chap. I, sect. C.

[3] Ibid., *1998, Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29), chap. I, sect. B.

[4] Ibid., *1999, Supplement No. 9* (E/1999/29), chap. I, sect. C.

[5] Ibid., *1998, Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29).

[6] Ibid., *1999, Supplement No. 9* (E/1999/29).

[7] Namely, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Mauritius, Mexico, Pakistan, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Thailand.

[8] Previous reports of the Secretary-General on chapter 36 of Agenda 21 submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development take up this discussion.

Annex

Work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development: education, public awareness and training for sustainability[a]

Priority areas for actions	*Tasks*	*Key actors cited by the Commission on Sustainable Development*
A. Clarify and communicate the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development	A.1 Implement chapter 36 and the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme as part of integrated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and conventions	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), other United Nations bodies, Governments, major groups
	A.2 Continue to clarify and communicate concepts and key messages, with emphasis on regional and national levels	UNESCO
B. Review national education policies and reorient formal educational systems	B.1 Develop policies and strategies for reorienting formal education towards sustainable development	Governments at all levels
	B.2 Include sustainable development objectives in curricula	Governments at all levels
	B.3 Develop guidelines for the reorientation of teacher training	UNESCO
	B.4 Reorient teacher training	Governments
	B.5 Introduce an interdisciplinary approach in teaching and research	Institutions of higher education
	B.6 Give due consideration to how the reform of higher education may support sustainable development	Participants at the conference (October 1998); UNESCO
C. Incorporate education into national strategies and action plans for sustainable development	C.1 Make education and public awareness significant components in regional, national and local strategies and action plans for sustainable development	Governments
	C.2 Complete the survey of existing regional and national strategies and action plans	UNESCO, with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat
	C.3 Integrate education into national and local strategies	Governments at all levels

Priority areas for actions	*Tasks*	*Key actors cited by the Commission on Sustainable Development*
	C.4 Integrate the aspect of gender balance and empowerment of women into national education strategies	Governments
D. Educate to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns in all countries	D.1 Raise awareness of relation to sustainability of current patterns of consumption and production; use educational tools and consumer feedback for policy-making; develop and promote social instruments; continue to work on indicators	Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNESCO, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
	D.2 Collect best practices in media and advertising	World Business Council for Sustainable Development, International Chamber of Commerce, trade unions, civil society
	D.3 Report to the Commission at its seventh session on progress made	Secretary-General of the United Nations
E. Promote investments in education	E.1 Consider current levels of financing in education from the perspective of sustainable development	UNDP, World Bank, other international financing institutions
F. Identify and share innovative practices	F.1 Continue work on international electronic registry	UNESCO
	F.2 Develop and strengthen international and regional alliances, associations, networks among educational and training institutions and professional bodies	Not specified
	F.3 Strengthen networks and partnerships	Governments
	F.4 Recognize and use traditional knowledge	Not specified
G. Raise public awareness	G.1 Develop capacities for raising public awareness and access to information	Governments
	G.2 Undertake information campaigns	Governments at all levels, media, advertising agencies
	G.3 Take into account relevant international conventions	Governments

[a] Summary, prepared by UNESCO as task manager for chapter 36, of decision taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session (New York, 20 April-1 May 1998) to adopt an expanded version of the work programme on chapter 36 of Agenda 21 that had been initiated at its fourth session in 1996.